MUSSOLINI'S PROPAGANDA ABROAD

Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940

Manuela A. Williams

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

MUSSOLINI'S PROPAGANDA ABROAD

This is the first major study in English of Fascist Italy's overseas propaganda. Using British, Italian and French documents, it is also the first investigation into the relationship between Mussolini's regime and Arab nationalist movements.

This new account covers propaganda and subversive activities engineered by the Italian government in the Mediterranean and the Middle East from 1935 until 1940, when Italy entered the war. It assesses the nature of the challenge brought by the Fascist regime to British security and colonial interests in the region.

Fascist propaganda, in particular in the Arab Middle East, must be regarded as an expression of Mussolini's foreign policy and his attempts to build an Italian empire that would stretch beyond the Mediterranean, gaining control over the exits, Gibraltar and Suez, which were in the hands of the British and the French.

The activities of individual agents and organisations are carefully reconstructed and analysed to highlight the seemingly contradictory objectives of the Italian government: on the one hand, Rome was courting the Arab nationalist movements in Egypt and Palestine, which were seeking the support of external forces capable of providing political, financial and military backing needed to overthrow foreign rulers; on the other, the regime was promoting further territorial expansion in Africa. These aspects build into an excellent picture of this fascinating period of modern history.

This book will be of great interest to all students and scholars of politics, media, Italian history and propaganda.

Manuela A. Williams is lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Strathclyde. Her current research interests include propaganda and political communications, the history and politics of modern Italy, and the history of the Middle East.

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE SERIES
General Editors: Richard J. Aldrich and Christopher Andrew

BRITISH MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN THE PALESTINE CAMPAIGN, 1914–1918
Yigal Sheffy

BRITISH MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN THE CRIMEAN WAR, 1854–1856
Stephen M. Harris

SIGNALS INTELLIGENCE IN WORLD WAR II
Edited by David Alvarez

KNOWING YOUR FRIENDS
Intelligence inside alliances and coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War
Edited by Martin S. Alexander

ETERNAL VIGILANCE
50 years of the CIA
Edited by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones and Christopher Andrew

NOTHING SACRED
Nazi espionage against the Vatican, 1939–1945
David Alvarez and Revd. Robert A. Graham

INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATIONS
How Ultra changed history
Ralph Bennett

INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT
Edited by David Charters, A. Stuart Farson and Glenn P. Hastedt

TET 1968
Understanding the surprise
Ronnie E. Ford

INTELLIGENCE AND IMPERIAL DEFENCE
British intelligence and the defence of the Indian empire 1904–1924
Richard J. Popplewell

ESPIONAGE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE?
Edited by Wesley K. Wark

THE AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION
A unofficial history
Frank Cain

POLICING POLITICS
Security intelligence and the liberal democratic state
Peter Gill

FROM INFORMATION TO INTRIGUE
Studies in secret service based on the Swedish experience 1939–45
C. G. McKay

DIEPPE REVISITED
A documentary investigation
John Campbell

MORE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE CENTRE
Andrew Gordievsky

CONTROLLING INTELLIGENCE
Edited by Glenn P. Hastedt

SPY FICTION, SPY FILMS AND REAL INTELLIGENCE
Edited by Wesley K. Wark

SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE IN A CHANGING WORLD
New perspectives for the 1990s
Edited by A. Stuart Farson, David Stafford and Wesley K. Wark

A DON AT WAR
Sir David Hunt KCMG, OBE (reprint)

INTELLIGENCE AND MILITARY OPERATIONS
Edited by Michael I. Handel

LEADERS AND INTELLIGENCE
Edited by Michael I. Handel

WAR, STRATEGY AND INTELLIGENCE
Michael I. Handel

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DECEPTION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Edited by Michael I. Handel

CODEBREAKER IN THE FAR EAST
Alan Stripp

INTELLIGENCE FOR PEACE
Edited by Hesi Carmel

INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN THE INFORMATION AGE
Michael Herman

ESPIONAGE AND THE ROOTS OF THE COLD WAR
The conspiratorial heritage
David McKnight

SWEDISH SIGNAL INTELLIGENCE 1900–1945
C. G. McKay and Bengt Beckman

THE NORWEGIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 1945–1970
Olav Riste

SECRET INTELLIGENCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Edited by Heike Bungert, Jan G. Heitmann and Michael Wala

THE CIA, THE BRITISH LEFT AND THE COLD WAR
Calling the tune?
Hugh Wilford

OUR MAN IN YUGOSLAVIA
The story of a secret service operative
Sebastian Ritchie

UNDERSTANDING INTELLIGENCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Journeys in shadows
Len Scott and Peter Jackson

MI6 AND THE MACHINERY OF SPYING
Philip H. J. Davies

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INTELLIGENCE
Edited by Wesley Wark

INTELLIGENCE AND STRATEGY
Selected essays
John Robert Ferris

THE US GOVERNMENT, CITIZEN GROUPS AND THE COLD WAR
The state–private network
Edited by Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford

PEACEKEEPING INTELLIGENCE
New players, extended boundaries
Edited by David Carment and Martin Rudner

SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE
A new instrument of war
Edited by Mark Seaman

MUSSOLINI'S PROPAGANDA ABROAD
Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940
Manuela A. Williams

MUSSOLINI'S PROPAGANDA ABROAD

Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940

Manuela A. Williams

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business

© 2006 Manuela A. Williams

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-415-35856-6 (Print Edition)

TO MY HUSBAND PETER AND SON DYLAN

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements xi
Abbreviations xii

Introduction 1

PART I
The interwar period 15

1 The challenge of nationalism: restructuring the British empire 17

2 A European Muslim power: Italy's policies in the *mare nostrum* and the Red Sea 30

3 Fascist Italy challenges the Anglo-Saudi partnership 44

PART II
Palestine and the radicalisation of Arab struggle: Italian and German propaganda, 1935–1940 49

4 The origins of the unrest: the sale of land 51

5 Italian activities in Palestine: Mussolini as 'The Sword of Islam' 63

6 Nazi Germany in the Middle East: the *Auswärtiges Amt* and the Palestine question 90

PART III
Italian propaganda in Egypt: Egyptian politics, Italian communities and Arab nationalism 107

7 Challenging the old system: Italian activities in British and French colonies 109

8 The Arabisation of Egyptian nationalism 118

9 Structure and forms of Italian propaganda 124

PART IV
Defending the empire: British imperial propaganda and counter-intelligence, 1936–1940 145

10 The war of words: British cultural diplomacy and counter-propaganda in the Middle East 147

11 Monitoring the enemy: British intelligence and counter-intelligence services in the interwar years 159

12 Mussolini's secret army: Italian intelligence services from the First to the Second World War 173

Conclusion 182

Notes 188
Bibliography 221
Index 235

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people and institutions who have made this study possible. This book began as a doctoral thesis and I owe a debt of gratitude, first of all, to my then supervisor and subsequently series editor, Professor Richard Aldrich, for his invaluable help, patience and constant encouragement; to Dr Gary Rawnsley for his precious insights and for introducing me to the fascinating study of propaganda. I am very grateful to the British Academy which, first by supporting my doctoral studies and then through a research grant, has effectively made this research possible. I am also indebted to my external examiner, Professor Philip Taylor, for his very useful comments; to Professor Conan Fischer, my former Head of Department, for having allowed me to complete this study at the height of the teaching season; to Dr Lotta Hedman for challenging my assumptions; to Dr Robert Mallett for pointing me in the right direction; to Professor Simon Tormey for his advice at the beginning of this research; to Angela Barthie for her excellent work in the French archives; to all my colleagues in the History Department, University of Strathclyde, for their moral support and friendship.

Staff at the archives where I collected most of my documentation – especially at the Public Record Office in London, the Archives and Special Collections, University of Durham and the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes – were most helpful and efficient. I also acknowledge the libraries of the Universities of Nottingham, Cambridge, Leeds, Durham and Newcastle, and the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford; for indispensable financial support, the British Council, the Gilchrist Educational Trust, the School of Politics and the University of Nottingham, and in particular Professor Paul Heywood who helped the final stages of my doctoral research.

Last but not least I would like to thank my parents, my grandparents and my husband Peter for their loving support throughout the years; Monica Lagazio for her enduring friendship; Alison Parker for her kind understanding; and all my friends for their much appreciated encouragement. Finally, I would like to mention my son Dylan, who kept me awake for many long nights giving me the opportunity to complete the last chapters.

ABBREVIATIONS

AEO	Agence de l'Egypte et de l'Orient
AIR	Air Ministry
CAB	Cabinet (Papers)
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CO	Colonial Office
DDI	*I documenti diplomatici italiani*
DGFP	*Documents on German Foreign Policy*
DSO	Defence Security Officer
EIAR	Ente Italiano di Audizioni Radiofoniche
FO	Foreign Office (Papers)
GC&CS	Government Code and Cypher School
GFM	German Foreign Ministry (Italian and German captured documents)
GHQ	General Headquarters
GUF	Gruppi Universitari Fascisti
IB	Intelligence Bureau
INF	Ministry of Information
IOLR	India Office Library Records
IPI	Indian Political Intelligence
IRCE	Istituto Nazionale per le Relazioni Culturali
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MEIC	Middle East Intelligence Centre
OVRA	Opera Volontaria di Repressione Antifascista or Organizzazione di Vigilanza e Repressione Antifascista
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
RAF	Royal Air Force
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre
SIA	Servizio informazioni aeronautiche
SIE	Servizio informazioni dell'esercito
SIM	Servizio informazioni militare
SIME	Security Intelligence Middle East
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service (British)
SSI	Sigint Signals Intelligence
WO	War Office

INTRODUCTION

> Moslems all over the world, though by no means united in their political and economic views or in social conditions, show an extraordinary unity in sentiment. They react in an identical manner and almost spontaneously to any question which affects the treatment of Moslems in any country. This reaction may be exploited by agitators, but is neither created nor directed by them.[1]

This statement, which seemingly reflects widespread perceptions of the Muslim world following the launch of the 'war on terror' in 2001, is in fact part of a broader review of British communication and publicity strategies in the Middle East conducted by the newly established Ministry of Information in August 1939. War in Europe would break out within less than a month, but until then security and communications in the Middle East had been somewhat overlooked. Poor co-ordination between intelligence agencies and the lack of a clear strategy to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim populations had severely weakened Britain's already precarious relations with the Arab populations and nationalist forces. This left the door open for penetration by hostile forces.

During the two last decades there have been significant advances in the field of intelligence history and propaganda studies, which have been generally held to have revolutionised our understanding of the approach, outbreak and subsequent course of the Second World War. However, little attempt has been made to examine the clandestine activities of the Mediterranean powers and, in particular, to assess Italian efforts to challenge the British and French colonial presence in the Middle East during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Nor has there been any substantial attempt to address the obverse of this subject, the British counter-intelligence effort against Italian espionage, subversion and propaganda, or to integrate this theme with British colonial and security policy throughout the Middle East. Secondary literature dealing with the twentieth-century history of the Middle East and the British empire has so far given a narrative and

somewhat one-dimensional account which underrates the challenge brought by the Italian Fascist government to the British imperial system in the Middle East. Furthermore, the broader issue of Italian media and cultural propaganda has so far received little attention, beyond limited work on British responses to Italian broadcasts in Egypt and Palestine.[2] This stands in contrast to a vast programme of scholarly research that has exhaustively explored the building of state propaganda machines in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In Italy, during the last three decades, some historians and journalists have approached the study of the Fascist regime, focusing on the 'mechanisms of consensus' generated by Mussolini's domestic propaganda, in particular on the eve and during the course of the Ethiopian campaign. These studies have emphasised the relationship between government and media – or more specifically the press – through an analysis of contents, criteria and models offered by journalistic practices intended to broadcast the rhetoric and epic of Italy's colonial adventure.[3] More generally, the volumes by Philip Cannistraro and Victoria De Grazia on Fascist manipulation of public consensus, produced respectively in 1975 and 1981, are still the most widely employed reference works.[4]

The latest additions to the library shelves are mostly concerned with analysing the implementation of Fascist propaganda during the Second World War. In *The Illusion of Victory* W. Vincent Arnold provides a fairly comprehensive picture of state propaganda and public perceptions during the conflict, while *Mussolini's Last Republic* by Luisa Quatermaine draws attention to the controversial debate surrounding the Italian Social Republic and the activities of the reformed Ministry of Popular Culture.[5] However, despite the increasing interest that Fascist propaganda has received of late, little work has been done to analyse and assess Fascist overseas propaganda during the interwar years. This study seeks to address these omissions and will provide a comprehensive analysis of Fascist attempts to subvert the British imperial structure by engaging in a war of words to win the favour of the Arab nationalist leadership.

During the course of this study several elements will be identified in order to produce a more coherent analysis of the complex phenomenon of propaganda. First of all, defining the context in which propaganda occurred is considered to be of great significance. The present study attempts to relate Italian propaganda to the set of political, economic and social circumstances that had undermined British imperial policy in the Middle East. It examines how the problems of the British administration in the region and the increasing tension between the British authorities and the Arab nationalist leadership were exploited by Italian propagandists and how the social and political environment contributed to develop the main features of Italian propaganda in the area.

A second element central to this study is the purpose of Italian propaganda. The promotion of Fascist ideology among the Middle Eastern populations was thrust by a political rather than ideological drive insofar as propaganda was carefully employed to expand the economic and military capacity of Fascist Italy. In addition to this, resentment generated by post-First World War territorial settlements, together with Italy's desire to see its status as a great power internationally recognised, played an important role in shaping Mussolini's colonial ambitions. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Fascist propaganda in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East will be mainly regarded as an instrument of peacetime diplomacy, a tool in the hands of the Italian government designed to further strategic and foreign policy objectives. And the Mediterranean dimension remained a constant feature of Italian foreign policy well after the demise of the Fascist regime. The special relationship with the Arab Middle East should be regarded neither as an isolated incident nor as a peculiarity of Fascist foreign policy: so much so, that in the midst of the Cold War, seeking to create an Italian sphere of influence in the Middle East, to assert its leadership in Europe and at the same time to act as an agent of the US in the turbulent years of the Suez crisis, Rome offered its services as a mediator between the Arabs, the US and Europe.[6] The Italian government played this role repeatedly throughout the 1980s, during the tragic events of the *Achille Lauro* and the Sigonella crisis.

'Successful propaganda campaigns tend to originate from a strong, centralized and decision-making authority that produces a consistent message throughout its structure'.[7] The organisation of the propaganda machine and the interaction of all its components are at the core of any research into activities designed to influence individual and collective perceptions and attitudes. The structure of the Fascist communications organisation has so far received little attention from either historians or propaganda scholars. The relative scarcity of primary documentation may account for this lack of interest. This study aims to identify and define the infrastructure supporting the work of Italian propagandists, before engaging in an examination of the forms and contents of Fascist propaganda. Although not entirely centralised, the Italian propaganda machine was mainly co-ordinated by the Ministry of Popular Culture whose synergy with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs guaranteed the smooth propagation of information overseas. Several departments and agencies were allocated responsibility over separate aspects of propaganda and communications. From an analysis of available Italian sources, the whole organisation seems to have been efficiently run; propaganda thus appears as the product of a well-oiled machine, a network of co-ordinated and skilfully linked governmental departments. The strong interdependence between foreign policy and overseas propaganda is emphasised by the presence of Galeazzo Ciano – the mastermind behind the first nucleus of propaganda

organisation – as head first of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda and then of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Italian propaganda in the Middle East failed to achieve its long-term objectives, the shortcomings and contradictions of Italian policy towards the Arab world became more manifest, undermining the foundations of a fragile partnership between Rome and the Arab capitals that propaganda had helped to forge.

Having identified the propagandist, the structure organising propaganda activities and the techniques employed, this study will focus on the targets and recipients of the Fascist campaign. Seeking to accelerate the dissolution of Britain's political, economic and military hegemony in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Mussolini spurred on the Arab populations and nationalist movements in their quest for an immediate end of the old colonial and Mandatory system. In particular, here attention will be given to the nature of the relationship between nationalist leaders and Mussolini's regime after Italy had suppressed the Senussi revolt in North Africa, invaded Abyssinia and assembled troops on the border between Libya and Egypt. The Arab world did appear substantially divided between those who denounced the brutalities of Italy's administration in Libya and imperialistic designs in East Africa, and those, like the Syrian journalist Emir Shakib Arslan, willing to portray Mussolini as the defender of the nationalist cause against the repressive policies of the two main European colonial powers. In truth, the contradiction between Italy's imperialistic ambitions and its anti-colonialist propaganda was clearly sensed by large sectors of Arab public opinion.[8] In Palestine, for example, although the press controlled by the Mufti of Jerusalem had repeatedly displayed a fairly benevolent attitude towards the Italian campaign in East Africa, and despite the intensifying Arab resentment towards the Mandatory government – 'guilty' above all of having encouraged the arrival and settlement of thousands of European Jews – the threat to the survival of a small nation like Ethiopia was initially perceived with great discomfort. In 1936, however, as emotions grew violent and unrestrained, some of the circles that had opposed Mussolini's expedition in Abyssinia came to applaud Italy's successes and the blow inflicted to Britain's international prestige. As early as 1936, the Arab leadership seemed on the way to develop and perfect a long-term strategy of exploiting great-power rivalry, a strategy subsequently fully resumed by Nasser who based most of his crucial decisions in foreign policy on the conflicting interests of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The chronological framework of this study is delimited by two important events: 1935, when Mussolini's expansionist intentions became clear after the invasion of Abyssinia, and 1940, when Italy entered the war, thus shifting its focus onto other geo-political areas previously under British influence (such as Thailand) and reducing to a certain extent its clandestine commitment in the Middle East, in favour of direct intervention on

Germany's side. Three main themes run parallel in this research: first of all, Italian propaganda and subversive activities in the Middle East are analysed within the context of Italian foreign policy and Mussolini's attempts to achieve a position of unchallenged power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Second, the impact of the awakening of Arab nationalism on British imperial and strategic security interests in the region will be explored. Third, questions will be asked concerning the nature of the British response to Italian activities in the Middle East and the role played by Fascist Italy in Britain's deteriorating relationship with the Arab world. In particular, there will be consideration as to whether Britain could have shored up its position with a more co-ordinated counter-intelligence structure, and whether regional political dynamics had by then accelerated the unstoppable decline of Britain's imperial presence in the area, rendering it intrinsically insecure against propaganda and subversion.

All the above themes are inextricably linked to a further subject, the broader activity of the Italian secret services in the Mediterranean before and after Italy signed the Axis Pact, including their relations with the services of the Axis powers. Questions remain as to the use of the intelligence services by Italian foreign policy-makers. Due to the extreme scarcity of both primary and secondary sources this subject is likely to remain in the shadows for the foreseeable future. In a country like Italy that has so far laboured to come to terms with its controversial recent history it is not surprising that the study of intelligence services has been generally disregarded. The very few memoirs cast a dim light over the history and development of the Italian intelligence system; only a handful of books have so far 'dared' to give an account of the activities of the numerous Italian intelligence agencies, while the bulk of relevant primary sources is still widely unavailable to the general public, hidden in inaccessible military archives.[9]

Propaganda is often regarded as an intrusive and manipulative practice perpetrated at the expense of a free flow of information and ideas within civil society. The term 'propaganda' originated in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV established the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Holy Congregation for Propagating the Catholic Faith) with a dual mission: to re-conquer those countries lost to Protestantism, and to promote the Catholic faith among the pagan populations of the New World. Due to its often questionable use over the centuries, the word 'propaganda' has acquired strong pejorative connotations. During the twentieth century in particular, the creation of refined and efficient state 'propaganda' machines strengthened the perception of propaganda as a tool in the hands of anti-democratic regimes and a menace to individual freedom.

Scholars have for a long time endeavoured to formulate a satisfactory definition of propaganda. As early as 1937, the newly born Institute for Propaganda Analysis attempted to identify the 'devices' employed by

propagandists to successfully appeal to and influence the feelings and perceptions of the general public, warning that 'the intelligent citizen does not want propagandists to utilize his emotions, even to the attainment of "good" ends, without knowing what is going on'.[10] Several studies have generally portrayed propaganda as the deliberate and systematic attempt to spread ideas and influence attitudes and behaviours; others have emphasised the element of deceit contained in the process of 'propagating' ideas rather than in the message itself. This, according to some scholars, makes it increasingly difficult for the recipients of the message to understand if and how they have been influenced. Political propaganda in particular is thus believed to generate a uniform and unquestioning audience, for it 'aims, either wittingly or unwittingly, at producing whole nation groups in which all individuals think, act and feel alike'.[11]

Although often elusive, a comprehensive definition of the term 'propaganda' is regarded as consequential to any analysis of the phenomenon and its effects. Some scholars, considering the legal implications of propaganda, have come to define it as the 'systematic attempt through mass communications to influence the thinking and thereby the behaviour of people in the interest of some in-groups'.[12] Others have focused on the purpose of the communication process underlying propaganda. Here, once again, the intentional nature of the process and its 'organised regularity' are emphasised. Propaganda is thus defined as the 'deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist';[13] or, very similarly, as the 'deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way', which would benefit those organising the persuading.[14] Assuming the above definitions, this study will attempt to analyse Italian propaganda, divesting the process of communication and persuasion from implicit moral judgement and from more sinister connotations, focusing on intentions, objectives and means employed by Fascist propagandists in the Middle East.

In the 1930s technological developments and the ideological entrenchment of opposite principles of liberal democracy and authoritarianism created in Europe a climate conducive to the flourishing of propaganda activities. The social consequences of the 1929 economic depression have also been attributed with great significance in forging a new relationship between the state and the media during the interwar years. Attempting to rebuild the foundations of a more stable social, political and economic life, governments sought the support of mass communication organisations whose assistance was believed indispensable to achieve the desired level of popular consensus. Media manipulation became a widespread practice in governments striving not only to consolidate their societies, but also 'to produce a legitimate reason for the possession of power by political leaders'.[15]

In the twentieth century with the advent of more sophisticated technological media, the communication between citizens and their governments – which many describe as the essence of public opinion – underwent profound changes. As a result, there has been a shift from direct to more 'mediated forms of communication in which a third party intervenes in the communication process between sender and recipient'.[16] Propaganda, whether employed by totalitarian regimes or by democratic governments, is often regarded as part of the process of communication between civil society and governmental institutions. Over the last 100 years, both totalitarian and democratic states alike have resorted to the use of propaganda to attain political objectives whether at home or abroad. The difference, it has been remarked, rests on diverse, almost opposite, approaches to the employment of techniques of persuasion.[17] Totalitarian regimes have appeared more conscious of the advantages offered by modern techniques in various fields and especially in communications, and have proved eager to employ them without hesitation. Conversely, democratic states have embraced and applied technical developments in human communications with more reluctance, unwilling to be perceived as breaching the traditions and moral principles underpinning democratic societies. Thus, when in 1934 Fascist Italy began its first radio broadcasts in Arabic to the Middle East, British officials were still opposed to any employment of propaganda – indelibly associated with falsehood and manipulation of public opinion – to limit the possible damages of Mussolini's 'air' campaign.

The structure of the Italian propaganda machine, so relatively unknown, might at first appear rather elementary and not as cohesive as the better-studied example masterminded by Goebbels in Germany. In reality, it was a rather complex organisation, presiding over both internal and overseas propaganda requirements of the Fascist regime. On the eve of the Abyssinian conflict, the Fascist machine for domestic propaganda was further stretched and fully deployed in order to obtain maximum popular consensus on the imminent military campaign. The Italian nation as a whole, in an effort that crossed class and, sometimes, ideological boundaries, was mobilised to support the 'legitimacy, goodness and "fatality" of the African expedition'.[18] Between spring 1935 and autumn 1936 the Italian government expanded the budget allocated to propaganda; Mussolini's control of domestic public opinion was achieved by propagating the Fascist message through radio, press, books, songs, postcards, photographs and documentaries, employing the full spectrum of available media for a total cost of forty million Italian lire.[19] The activity of the Italian press and especially of war correspondents during the Abyssinian conflict deserves a brief but special mention. Some 200 Italian journalists and writers had been accredited to report from the war front, in short to celebrate the advance of Italian troops and glorify Mussolini's colonial enterprise. Only a few of them, an exiguous contingent, found it difficult to

reconcile their own moral imperatives with the propaganda directives imparted by the Ministry of Press and Propaganda and by its Secretary, Count Ciano, who was soon to join them in Ethiopia. Immediately after the war, most reporters, together with some members of the party and military hierarchy already mentioned, produced a collection of memoirs that highlighted the exotic, epic and sometimes frivolous aspects of the conflict. As it has been remarked:

> The scenery of Ethiopia was majestic and there was an abundance of material, but what these writers lacked was a valid justification for the war – a moral justification. Despite their diligent attempts to present it in a favourable light, despite the tricks they used, despite all their talent, it remained a war of conquest.[20]

The creation of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda in June 1935 (in May 1937 renamed the Ministry of Popular Culture) was intended to centralise the process of formulation and implementation of domestic and overseas Fascist propaganda:

> From this moment on ... thousands of messages, some crafted with subtle malice, others with effective coarseness, reach the Italians through 530,000 private radio broadcasting stations, 11,000 radio receivers donated to schools and organisations sponsored by the regime, 81 daily newspapers and 132 journals of political opinions, news bulletins and documentaries of the Istituto Luce.[21]

With the establishment of the Ministry of Popular Culture, Italian efforts to engineer an efficient propaganda machine reached their climax. As early as 1933, Mussolini had begun to appreciate the significance and role of propaganda as a political and diplomatic instrument for his designs of consolidation of domestic power and overseas expansion. In August 1933 Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and protégé, was appointed head of the regime's Press Office, which would soon be transformed into an Under-Secretariat for Press and Propaganda. Ciano, directly supported by Mussolini, devoted resources to strengthen and expand the existing structure: his activity and control rapidly extended from the press to the cinema, theatre and radio. A year after Ciano's appointment, with an increased budget the Under-Secretariat for Press and Propaganda included seven directorates: Italian press, foreign press, propaganda, cinema, theatre, radio and tourism. It has been emphasised that Ciano's conception of how a propaganda organisation should be constructed and operated was strongly influenced by the way Goebbels had restructured the Nazi propaganda apparatus, centralising the decision-making core and, at the same time, devising a number of specialised sections.[22] At this early stage

in Italo-German relations, however, Ciano appeared more receptive to the organisational model provided by the German propaganda structure than attracted to the ideology informing Goebbels's activities. The idea of an efficient machine that could co-ordinate and unify politics, information and culture for propaganda purposes was not unfamiliar to Fascist Italy and it had been the subject of recent debates in some intellectual circles affiliated to the regime. German progress to that end was studied and assessed with great care and interest.[23]

In 1935, the publication in the Official Gazette of detailed figures related to the propaganda expenditures of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Under-Secretariat for Press and Propaganda for the years 1933–34, 1934–35 – and including estimates for 1935–36 – gave the measure of the importance the Fascist regime ascribed to the use of propaganda. Over half of the expenditure was allocated to maintenance of Italian schools abroad, with the intention of preserving and strengthening the links between Italy and Italian nationals living overseas. Schools as well as other cultural institutions, however, were often utilised to attract local sympathisers of Fascist Italy and to promote the benefits offered by friendly relations with Mussolini's regime. The total propaganda expenditure for the year 1934–35 came to over 67,000,000 Italian lire. According to British sources this amounted to 3 per cent of the Italian government's overall expenditure, a price the Italian authorities considered worth paying not only to perpetuate the *italianità* – Italian character – of Italian emigrants, but also to advertise 'to the world at large the cultural legacy of ancient Rome and the progress in various fields to which the Fascist revolution had inspired the new Italy'.[24]

With the creation of the Ministry of Popular Culture the regime broadened its control over the cultural sector. It has also been remarked that as the Ministry was renamed, the word 'propaganda' was dropped: a clear indication of the negative connotations attached to the term and practice of propaganda. Some, within the regime, had argued that this 'ugly word' should be expelled from the Fascist vocabulary and that the Italian people wanted to be informed, not propagandised.[25] The Ministry of Popular Culture expanded its remit and administrative authority, increasing in size and reforming some of its key bureaux concerning press and domestic and overseas propaganda. It is worth noting here that the Ministry's Propaganda Bureau was reorganised into a number of sections following the same geographical areas utilised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[26] This certainly facilitated exchange of information between the two institutions and opportunities for co-ordinating propaganda and subversive activities, especially in areas like the Middle East.

This study, divided into four parts and twelve chapters, is structured following a geo-political division of Italian activities in the Middle East, rather than a chronological order. Such organisation of the material makes

it possible to construct a more cohesive analysis of the specific features of Italian intervention in individual areas of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, for the strategies adopted by Italian propagandists were aimed at providing the most suitable response to local socio-political conditions, and would mostly rely on the existing consular and community structures. This study focuses mainly on two areas, Palestine and Egypt, and touches on the Arabian peninsula, without, however, neglecting to mention parallel cases of Italian propaganda in other North African and Middle Eastern countries. The choice is not arbitrary; it is primarily determined by available sources which indicate Palestine, Egypt and the Red Sea region as the main targets for the co-ordinated activities of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Popular Culture.

Part I, comprised of three chapters, concentrates on the interwar period, sketching the landscape of British and Italian strategic and diplomatic policies in relation to the Mediterranean and the Near East. This is essential in order to understand the social and political environment in which Italian propagandists operated; it also serves to define the nature of Britain's subsequent response to Italian subversive intervention in view of the security and imperial concerns that had informed the course of action undertaken by the British government. Chapter 3, in particular, is concerned with the challenge brought by Italian propaganda to the delicate diplomatic equilibrium in the Arabian peninsula, where – as in Egypt – British influence was indirectly exerted through a network of formal agreements and informal partnerships. This chapter will assess Mussolini's attempts to consolidate the Italian presence on both shores of the Red Sea through an increasingly aggressive campaign to win the co-operation of the Yemeni authorities. Italian radio propaganda and subversive activities – mainly co-ordinated by the local consular offices – are set against Saudi–Yemeni rivalry for control over regional strategic locations and economic resources. The effects of Italian propaganda endeavours are examined within the context of what appeared to be a stable Anglo-Saudi partnership. Italy's intervention in the peninsula, Germany's interest in cultivating trade relations with the Saudi kingdom and, above all, the escalation of the conflict between Arab populations and governments and the British authorities over Palestine – all these elements placed a considerable strain upon the long-term Anglo-Saudi 'special relationship'.

Part II, also including three chapters, constitutes the core of this study. It deals with events in Palestine between 1935 and 1940, and in particular with the 1936–39 Arab rebellion. The ambiguities of Britain's policies towards both the Arab and the Jewish communities in Palestine, the increasing tension that characterised the relations between the British Mandatory authorities and the Arab nationalist leadership, and the gathering of consensus and respect around the Arab nationalist movement, were all circumstances carefully exploited by Italian propaganda makers. Part II

also aims to outline the structure and development of the Italian overseas propaganda machine during the five years preceding Italy's entry into the war, and attempts to examine similarities and divergences between the policies implemented by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in relation to the Middle East in general, and more specifically to the Palestine question. The impact of Palestine's deteriorating stability and tumultuous internal affairs on Arab relations with the European powers is of great significance. On the one hand, it is one of the key elements in the rapid demise of Britain's presence in the Arab Middle East, and in the creation of a surprisingly united Arab front against the perpetuation of colonial rights in European-controlled territories. On the other hand, it was conducive to an awkward and paradoxical alliance between some sectors of the Arab nationalist leadership and intellectual circles, and the Axis powers. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, however, responded differently to calls for support coming from the Arab quarters: the latter refused – at least until 1938 – any official engagement that could result in overturning Britain's position in the Middle East. The former welcomed and actively encouraged any form of co-operation with local movements that would boost Italy's relations with the Arabs in view of a future expansion of Italy's sphere of influence in those areas formally or informally administered by the British government.

The implementation of Fascist subversive policies in one of Palestine's strategically most prominent neighbours, Egypt, is the subject of analysis in Part III of this study, in particular in Chapters 8 and 9. Here two lines of investigation are pursued: the first one aims to define the local network – Italian consular offices, educational institutions and community structures – upon which the government in Rome relied in order to execute its propaganda directives. The second is intended to trace the impact of both Egyptian domestic politics and events of international relevance – such as the Arab rebellion in Palestine and the Italo-Abyssinian conflict – on the contents of Italian propaganda messages and the practices adopted by Italian propaganda makers. Furthermore, the adoption of pan-Arab models greatly contributed to transforming the Egyptian nationalist movement and strengthening the relationship between Egypt and other Arab and Muslim countries; this, in turn, further undermined Britain's position in Egypt and created an audience to a certain extent receptive to Fascist propaganda. Also in Part III, Chapter 7 focuses on the campaign of cultural propaganda and subversive activities orchestrated by the Fascist regime in British- and French-controlled territories in the Middle East and North Africa, which intensified in the months following the outbreak of the Abyssinian crisis and was intended to consolidate the ties between Italy and the Muslim world.

Part IV of this study examines British political, diplomatic and intelligence efforts to counteract Italy's policy of expansion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In particular, it attempts to evaluate the

nature of Britain's counter-propaganda strategy, aimed to prevent the formation and strengthening of a political and military alliance between Fascist Italy and the Arab nationalist movement at large. Part IV considers three aspects as essential to an understanding of Britain's interaction with regional and international players in the Middle Eastern political scenario. Chapter 10 outlines the strategy adopted by the British government to offset the effects of the propaganda war waged by the Fascist regime. More specifically, it focuses on the interwar debate over the use of propaganda – after the successful experiments of the First World War – as an effective diplomatic tool, as persuasive means to attain domestic consensus about Britain's imperial commitments, and as an acceptable and necessary instrument to reach the minds of a disenchanted and increasingly hostile Arab world. Chapter 11 is concerned with the role played by British intelligence and counter-intelligence services in helping shape the perception afforded in London of Italian activities in the Middle East and, more generally, of regional dynamics threatening the stability of Britain's direct administration and informal links in the area. In the late 1930s, the weakness of the relatively poorly developed British counter-intelligence structure became particularly evident in the Middle East, where competing agencies – mainly understaffed – often provided incomplete and questionable information about internal or external forces undermining the cohesion and security of the empire. The security dimension of imperial policy was certainly not overlooked in London. Nevertheless, lack of co-ordination between the disparate governmental departments and regional agencies in charge of monitoring undesirable developments in the territories controlled by the British crown did not favour a comprehensive appreciation of regional interactions or the formulation of a coherent political strategy aimed at retaining the Arab world as a close partner. Finally, Chapter 12 will run through the major interwar structural developments shaping the growth of the highly fragmented Italian secret services, whose success during the 1930s and early 1940s largely depended on the initiative and abilities of talented individuals rather than the effectiveness and cohesion of the organisation.

At the core of this study are British, French and Italian military and diplomatic archival sources, as well as British, Italian and German published documents. The main body of Italian primary sources here examined comes from the Public Record Office, London, and consists of over 100,000 photostats and some transcripts of official documents made by the Allies after the fall of Rome in 1944. It includes invaluable documentation from the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mussolini's Secretariat. Copies of this material are available also at the National Archives in Washington DC, and have recently become available at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. It is also worth remembering that the Foreign Office political files contain a great

number of official transcripts of Radio Bari broadcasts in Arabic from 1934 until 1939, a rare documentation whose most detailed collection can be found in Rabat (Archives Générales du Royaume) and Florence (Archivio Nazionale).

Finally, it should be remembered that evaluating the impact of propaganda on public opinion is an elusive task, for there is no reliable method that would uncover a clear correlation between a particular propaganda campaign and the change in attitudes and behaviour of the target audience of that campaign. While broad assumptions can be made, we should be wary of attributing particular shifts in public perceptions solely to the influence of propaganda, as it is never certain whether public opinion was influenced by specific messages or would have reached particular conclusions because of the interplay of diverse factors.